

# THE WORK ETHIC AND THE CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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1. Award wages are provided to participants from groups participating in the Co-operative New Enterprise course. The award wage is paid for the duration of the course. The wage is paid to guarantee a minimum standard of living for course participants.
2. In contrast, participants in the Small Business New Enterprise course are not paid a guaranteed wage. Participants in this course are expected to generate their own income.
3. It is appropriate, therefore, to review the impact of paying award wages to participants and, in particular, establish whether or not there is a work disincentive.
4. A work disincentive would exist if it were possible to prove that the payment of a guaranteed wage reduced work quality and effort.
5. It is another question as to whether or not it is possible to produce evidence that is value-free and, therefore, beyond argument.
6. Arguments about work are predicated on explicit and/or implicit ideology.
  
7. Before accepting the validity of the analysis outlined in 1-6, it is necessary to establish all those factors influencing the attitudes and behavior of participants in the Co-operative New Enterprise course and not simply adopt a simple explanation for a complex situation. The major factors could be summarised as follows:
  - 7.1 The commitment of participants to establishing and developing democratic co-operative business enterprises.
  - 7.2 The pre-entry requirements for participation in the Co-operative New Enterprise course.
  - 7.3 The structure, content and presentation of the Co-operative New Enterprise courses.
  - 7.4 The developmental stage of co-operatives - philosophy, principles and practices.

Any one or a combination of these factors could be a work incentive or disincentive.

8. Commitment (7.1): Commitment is basic to the establishment and development of co-operative business enterprises. While workshops and courses can reflect and reinforce this commitment, they cannot be expected to establish the commitment. Of course, if they fail to reflect and reinforce an existing commitment, then, they could jeopardise its development. While the Program emphasises the significance of commitment, it is difficult to substantiate in practice unless groups are required to demonstrate commitment. It is appropriate to consider, therefore, how commitment could be appropriately demonstrated and tested. Participation in courses over a four to six month period with guaranteed wages is not necessarily an adequate measure, But, then, removing the guaranteed wage could merely test who could afford a commitment. The \$ value of paid-up and unpaid capital is another measure of commitment. But, then, it could equally measure relative wealth. A financial commitment should not be confused with a co-operative commitment and understanding.
9. Pre-entry requirements (7.2): If pre-entry requirements enable uncommitted groups to enter the course, then, they could hardly be blamed for their lack of commitment. The Greer-Meredith report has suggested that existing pre-entry requirements are inadequate - attendance at a Co-operative Intenders course and a recommendation of the CDP Funding Committee. In recognition of this, an Introducing Worker Co-operatives workshop is being introduced to precede the Co-operative Intenders course. Skill audits will also be a precondition before groups are permitted to proceed into the Co-operative New Enterprise course. It could also be argued that a group should have a sound business idea before proceeding and that a procedure should be established for establishing its validity and this assessment could then be made available to the C.D.P. Funding Committee for its consideration and decision. Pre-entry requirements should ensure that there is a fit between participants and course. Subject to appropriate course modifications, it needs to be established that participants are willing and able to take advantage of the course e.g., they have the appropriate language skills. A further pre-entry basis should be acceptance and understanding of course requirements e.g., nominated participants attend whole course.
10. Structure, content and presentation (7.3): The Greer-Meredith report has suggested that the Co-operative New Enterprise course needs to be reorganised and restructured. In emphasising the undertaking of feasibility studies and the development of business (enterprise) plans the course assumes both a co-operative and democratic

commitment and understanding and does not, therefore, seriously address the practical consequences and complexities of these commitments. The course is predicated on small business values, assumptions and expectations. This has an ideological consequence that should neither be under nor over estimated. What could and should not be over-estimated is the impact of a course that does not succeed in integrating co-operative and democratic philosophy and principles within business methodology. Unless teachers can demonstrate their convincement that co-operation is an alternative to private enterprise and that this is reflected and reinforced in their teaching, then, a contradiction is created for students. Equity also requires unequal resourcing to prevent the ascendancy of Social Darwinism - the continued dominance of already dominant groups. Individuals and groups participating in the course are unequal and, therefore, resourcing should redress these inequalities. It is necessary to consider whether or not there are problems of educational and ethnic bias in the courses. Admitting participants with few educational credentials does not eliminate educational bias. Nor does the use of translations and interpreters eliminate an ethnic bias. While a basic level of competence is required, this should not be equated with credentials. Paulo Freire has warned against education as the exercise of domination (1), has argued that education must be based on problem-posing (2) and that the teacher-student contradiction is only resolved when both are simultaneously teachers and students (3). The educational process adopted in the Program is based on the literary-mode. Yet, as Caleb Gattegno, has argued - learning occurs more through sight than through languages. (4)

11. Developmental stages (7.4): Worker co-operatives are an under-developed form of co-operation in Australia. The co-operative movement is dominated by traditional producer and consumer co-operatives whose views on co-operation are based on their own developmental experiences and, therefore, these are not necessarily appropriate for emerging forms of co-operation. The traditional co-operative movement differs with newer forms of co-operatives over industrial democracy, politicisation, self-help, equity, surplus distribution and the State.
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1

Freire, Paulo Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Herder and Herder, 1970  
P 65

2

Ibid, p 68

3

Ibid, p 59

4

Gattegno, Caleb Towards A Visual Culture: Education Through Television, Avon, January 1971, pp 161-163.

12. Inevitably, therefore, 8 to 11 impact on participants in the Co-operative New Enterprise course and place arguments about guaranteed wages in context. It remains to be established whether or not the guaranteed wage has an independent negative and/or positive impact irrespective of these factors. Specifically: Does the provision of a guaranteed wage reduce the motivation to work?
13. The answer to this question is extraordinarily complex. Worker co-operatives are attempting to develop a new kind of motivation based on a social rather than profit ethic. This is difficult to realise in a society which places pre-eminent value on private ownership, control and reward. Ultimately, then, the answer depends not so much on the evidence but on the ideological definition and interpretation of this evidence. (5)

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For those who argue that work can be discussed without and despite ideology the following would be useful:

Anthony, P.D. The Ideology of Work, Tavistock, 1978

Meakin, David Man and Work:Literature and Culture in Industrial Society, Methuen, 1976.